

University of Connecticut
Veteran Student Organization (VSO)

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Good afternoon Senator Mae Flexer, Representative Jack Hennessey, ranking members, and esteemed members of the Veterans' Affairs Committee:

My name is Spencer Cohen and I am a Marine Veteran. I am a member of the UConn Student Veteran Organization and I am testifying in support of SB 287.

What it comes down to is veterans trying to get an education. Most veterans depend on their G.I. Bill housing stipend along with an odd job or two to pay their bills. These individuals can't afford to use their G.I. Bill over the summer and intersessions as they will not have enough time remaining to finish their degrees. Some veterans need the summer and intersession to spread out their course loads, so they can be there to provide for their families. Others just need to fill in some general education requirements that save them a semester worth of benefits. If we've already agreed that these veterans deserve a tuition waiver, what sense does it make to say they can't use it during certain times of the year? Is there service somehow less meaningful during the winters and the summers? It is difficult enough transitioning back to civilian life after service, these veterans just want to get through school as fast as possible and get back to a job where they feel like they can actually make a difference. It's counterintuitive to take several months off in the middle of a process that is already typically four years. I've heard from veterans who were trying to figure out how they could get by using their G.I. Bill during the summer and their tuition waiver during the school year. Financial it is a nightmare that forces a veteran to choose between getting the best education they can and being able to pay their bills the entire time they are in school. Personally I've struggled transitioning back to school. If I didn't have the ability to use the tuition waiver during the intersession, I don't know if I would have been able to keep up as much as I have at this point. I may have been discouraged and unable to reach my academic goals. Not every veteran needs or wants to take an intersession or summer class, but for the majority the ability to take an intersession class without having to worry about running out of benefits will take off a lot of pressure during an already stressful process.

SB 287 An Act Concerning Tuition and Fee Waivers for Veterans and Members of the Connecticut National Guard at Public Institutions of Higher Education.

Spencer Cohen

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